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Joseph Szyliowicz

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JOSEPH SZYLIOWICZ*

For the first time in many years hope exists that imaginative diplomacy can bring to an end the vicious cycle of war and more war that has afflicted Israelis and Arabs for so many tragic years. Yet, as I shall demonstrate below, that hope still remains only a hope; even though an important door to peace was opened with the conclusion of the recent Israeli-Egyptian agreement, the very considerable difficulties that had to be surmounted and the extensive promises that the United States had to make demonstrate only too clearly how difficult it will be to reach agreement on the tougher issues that lie ahead.

One important reason why peace is likely to be elusive is that although many Arabs might now be willing to seek a peaceful settlement of this tragic conflict, many others still regard Israel as an alien intrusion whose sovereign Jewish character must be eliminated. And such Arabs are not only in power in such states as Libya or in control of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, but they represent important elements within other countries including Egypt, which is generally regarded as one of the leading "moderates" in the region. Thus the road to peace is complicated by very different perceptions within the Arab world concerning the character, goals, and legitimacy of Israel, and this disunity extends to important groups within each state and to the ranks of the Palestinians as well. In short, even if one is optimistic concerning the intention and willingness of Arab leaders such as President Sadat to strive for a final settlement, pressures within and between the Arab states do not facilitate its achievement.

Further complicating the search for peace is a similar division within Israel. Here conflict revolves around different perceptions of the goals and intentions of the Arab states and important differences concerning the willingness to take risks to achieve peace are evident. Many view President Sadat as a leader who remains committed to the destruction of Israel but who is engaged in clever tactical maneuvering designed to enhance his position and, though once the government accepted the deal with Egypt arranged by Kissinger only a minority remained in opposition, more and more Israelis may be less and less willing to make the kinds of concessions that may be required to resolve the more difficult questions such as Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the future of the Palestinians, that must inevitably be-

* Professor, Graduate School of International Studies, University of Denver; B.A., University of Denver, 1953; M.A., Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, 1955; Ph.D., Columbia University, 1961.

come the foci of negotiations. The existence of such perceptions by the parties involved has for years complicated the search for peace in the Middle East and continues to do so at present.

However one views the extent to which Sadat and other Arab leaders may be genuinely interested in peace, there is widespread agreement that the October 1973 war represents a watershed in the bloody history of the region. The war forced a reappraisal of Israeli strategic doctrine, demonstrated that the new military technology would make another major conflict far more destructive than heretofore, and gave the Arabs a sense of accomplishment that may represent a necessary psychological precondition for peace. Above all, it forced the United States to accord a high priority to the region and Secretary of State Kissinger, spurred by concern for U.S. interests (including the flow of oil), moved astutely to exploit the new situation. He initiated an active round of diplomacy that culminated in an end to the embargo and in military disengagement agreements between Israel and Egypt in the Sinai and Israel and Syria in the Golan Heights. In September 1975 he achieved, after seven days of intensive "shuttle diplomacy," what he failed to accomplish six months earlier—a second interim agreement between Egypt and Israel. This accord, which is qualitatively different from the original disengagement agreements, represented an important development in the search for peace. This agreement extends the military truce that had prevailed into new areas, both geographically, as the Israelis made significant strategic concessions by withdrawing from the key Sinai passes and the important Abu Rudeis oil field and functionally, for the new accord is designed to prevent hostilities for at least three years and to lessen tensions in order to permit the development of the kind of climate that might lead to further agreements. Specifically the two parties agreed that the conflict should be resolved by peaceful rather than military means, that neither would use force or military blockades and that Egypt would permit civil cargoes to or from Israel to pass through the Suez Canal and would not blockade the Red Sea. The United States also entered into separate agreements with the two parties which were instrumental in making the accord possible. Among other things the United States pledged to assist Israel with extensive economic and military assistance, amounting to over $2 billion. Moreover, American civilian technicians are to man surveillance stations that would monitor the military aspects of the accord and thus act as a deterrent should either side attempt to alter the military status quo.

The difficulties in reaching agreement on essentially the simplest of the issues that must be resolved in the search for peace were immense. The Israelis felt that they were taking a significant gamble in ceding strategic territory for Egyptian promises, and Kissinger had

to press the Israeli government hard to get them to accept his optimistic view that an unique opportunity to achieve a settlement now existed, and Israel should therefore take a long term perspective and be willing to take some chances in order to make peace possible. That Israeli leaders remained unconvinced of Arab intentions and were not easily persuaded (despite their awareness of the costs of alienating the United States, Israel's indispensable ally) is attested to by the breakdown of the March 1975 negotiations and the kinds of commitments that they extracted from the United States in return for their concessions.

President Sadat also had to weigh difficult and complex considerations. Beset by serious internal problems including a weak economy, a rapidly growing population and marked social tensions, he desired the agreement so that he could concentrate on these issues and secure the American economic and technological assistance that is indispensable if Egypt is to escape from its socio-economic stagnation. This policy, however, was not universally applauded within the Arab world. On the one hand, such moderate-conservative, oil-rich states as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait strongly supported Sadat's attempt to reorient his country more towards the West and, one should add, so did Iran, a non-Arab state which is playing a subtle and important background role in the politics of the area. On the other hand, radical elements within Egypt and the Arab world viewed Sadat's policy as a betrayal of the Arab struggle. In addition, the press and radio of Libya, Iraq, and to a lesser extent, Syria, bitterly criticized the Egyptian decision.

One reason for the discord, besides the apparent rift that it creates within the Arab world, is that Sadat's decision forces other Arab parties to choose among very difficult options. Particularly affected were the Palestinians and Syria for the latter is clearly the next state to be involved in negotiations. It will be far more difficult, however, for the Syrians and Israelis to reach agreement because of the strategic importance of the Golan Heights to the two sides and the limited area involved. In sharp contrast to the pre-1967 situation when Syrian artillery harassed Israeli communities, it is the Israelis who now possess the potential to shell Damascus itself and to drive back any Syrian offensive before it enters Israel. Moreover, control of Mt. Hermon gives the Israelis a very strategic observation post. These are advantages that the Israelis are not likely to concede lightly, particulary since they tend to consider President Assad to be even more intransigent than Sadat. Further complicating the issue is the fact that the Israelis have established about twenty settlements in the area which, as government spokesmen have made clear on several occasions, will not be evacuated until a final settlement is reached.

Assad, too, is beset by conflicting pressures from within Syria and from the other Arab states. Though he has successfully enlarged the base of his support and maintained a stable regime since he came to power in 1970, Assad must maneuver carefully so as not to alienate important elements within Syria. Moreover, the Syrian Bath Party which he heads is engaged in a bitter ideological dispute with its counterpart in Iraq, each claiming to be the correct interpreter and exponent of Bathist ideology, and has consistently taken a tough line over any agreement with Israel. In its national congress of July 1975, for example, resolutions calling for the "liberation" of all Palestine were passed.

Given such an officially rigid stance, Assad did not welcome the Israeli-Egyptian agreement. Not wishing to be isolated he utilized various tactics to strengthen his position and to pressure Egypt, including reaching agreement with two actors, the PLO and King Hussein, who were bitter enemies. He established a "joint command" with the guerrillas and set up a "Supreme Command Council" with Jordan thus creating a framework within which to coordinate economic and military affairs. These dramatic developments represent a potential threat to Tel Aviv, for Syrian-Jordanian military cooperation (possibly supported by the Iraqis who, despite their feud with Syria, remain publicly strongly committed to the extreme Arab position concerning Israel) changes the strategic situation and strengthens Assad's hands in future negotiations. Assad also played an active role in the campaign to expel Israel from the United Nations, a move which further increased his bargaining position but which also brought him into conflict with President Sadat who, apparently in accordance with the terms of the interim agreement, successfully blunted this policy on several occasions.

Under these conditions it is not easy to foresee what will follow the Egyptian-Israeli accord on the northern front. It is unlikely that a comprehensive agreement could be worked out in the near future given the ideological differences, and the strategic importance of the Golan Heights. Assad could therefore choose to renew military hostilities in some way or accept minor changes along the existing cease fire lines. The military option is not likely to appear attractive, however, given the present state of relations with Iraq and King Hussein's unwillingness to take significant risks. Hence it is quite possible that Assad will accept (as Kissinger has been urging) some kind of rectifications with the understanding that serious talks over the future of the entire Golan Heights will be undertaken within a reasonable time.

Such a development would be highly favorable, for an an agreement would maintain the initiative towards peace and might lead to

a relaxation of tensions and the development of a more propitious climate for a broader understanding on the future of the Golan. When such an accord could be negotiated is not clear, for tensions will probably have to be reduced before the Israelis would be willing to make major concessions and time is clearly required for feelings of trust to develop. In this regard, too, the agreement with Egypt is pivotal—if stability and a relaxation of hostilities does occur then progress in talks between Syria and Israel will be facilitated. Such developments will not occur quickly, however. Merely to implement the military aspects of the Sinai accord will take about six months and further time will have to elapse before the deeply ingrained perceptions of each side can be modified. Moreover, the U.S. presidential elections are rapidly approaching and it is not likely that the United States would be prepared to engage in a new initiative involving major commitments before January, 1977.

Even if one takes a very optimistic view concerning the possibility of an agreement between Syria and Israel, one is still left with the sensitive question of the future of Jerusalem and the critical issue which is central to any long range solution—the future of the Palestinians. They too (within and without the PLO) are badly divided. One must remember that many live on the West Bank (which King Hussein has not abandoned despite the resolutions of the Rabat conference) and the Gaza strip. In these areas many diverse currents can be discerned ranging from support for King Hussein to pro-PLO feelings. Even if one considers the PLO to be representative of the Palestinians, however, the pattern is still one of division and discord. Essentially, the PLO is split between the "moderates" headed by Yasir Arafat and the "rejectionists" who oppose any concessions to Israel and who refuse to compromise in any way their goal of establishing that "democratic secular state" which so obviously represents a euphemism for the destruction of Israel.

Egypt's decision was a bitter blow to the PLO's leadership for it threatens the very bases of its claims and suggests that Egypt may be willing to make peace at the expense of the Palestinians. Equally troublesome is the dilemma that Sadat's action poses for them. If Arafat breaks with Egypt he risks alienating that important country as well as those elements in the Arab world, particularly the oil rich states of the Persian Gulf, who support President Sadat and his policies. If he does not break with Egypt he runs the great risk that his position and that of the moderates will be undermined by the "rejectionists."

What kind of response will be forthcoming as well as what kind of agreement can be worked out that involves the Palestinians is

therefore very difficult to foresee, though at the time that Yasir Arafat appeared before the United Nations General Assembly there were some tentative signs that moderates within the PLO might be willing to compromise their hitherto unyielding stand concerning Israel. Whether these did in fact signal the evolution of a new negotiating stance is unclear but the task of diplomacy is to explore such possibilities. Here, too, the positions taken by the other Arab states are critical and at present it appears that only Libya is uncompromisingly set against any agreements with Israel. Even such hitherto obdurate countries as Iraq, which may be turning more and more to questions of domestic development, and Syria, which runs a considerable risk of diplomatic isolation, may well choose to coordinate their policies more closely with Egypt and those other states that appear willing to reconcile their differences with Israel. If such a trend does exist within the Arab world, then the chances of an agreement involving the Palestinians are enormously enhanced, for the future of their cause depends to a large extent on the support of key Arab states.

What emerges from this analysis, therefore, is that powerful elements within the Arab world may be moving cautiously in the direction of a settlement with Israel on terms that may be mutually acceptable. Until now the "radicals" have always possessed the preponderance of political power and have been able to exert sufficient pressure on their more moderate brethren to block agreement, but developments in recent months do point in the direction of change in the Arab world. It would be naive, however, to overestimate the extent to which the kind of environment which is needed to let peace flourish has yet occurred. Even the most moderate elements among the Arabs and within Israel remain highly suspicious of each other's motives and intentions and it will not be easy to secure agreement, as I have stressed, on such difficult issues as the Golan Heights, Jerusalem, and the future of the Palestinians.

Nevertheless, the effort must be made and the momentum that has been achieved must be utilized to explore and exploit whatever potential for peace may now exist. Without this the gains to date will be dissipated quickly. If future gains are to be made, they will come about only after long, arduous negotiations between the parties. That, however, may well be highly desirable for any settlement can endure only if all those involved feel that they have struggled to hammer out an agreement which provides them with the greatest possible benefits and which represents accomodations that each can accept positively. Only at the end of such a process, a process which must include a general meeting of some sort at Geneva, can one envisage the Middle East as a region of peace whose inhabitants will be free to achieve the kind of future to which they all aspire.